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The region's nations have tried to cooperate among themselves to lessen tension and to promote peace and security in the region. These attempts still need more effort to achieve the hoped-for results.

This paper analyzes the situation in the region, focusing on its importance and elements of tension, and it examines the possibility to achieve a state of peace and security. This peace and security can be achieved through cooperative economic behavior, as a prelude to achieving political stability and peace. The participation of both superpowers and all countries in the region is an essential requirement to change the Mediterranean region to a "peaceful lake."

• USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN  
AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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26 March 1990

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ABSTRACT

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# THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Whenever we address the subject of Mediterranean importance we should bear in mind that the maritime history began there. It is instructive to note that there are some geostrategic aspects of the history of the Mediterranean which are as relevant today as they were 2000 years ago.

The key word in its importance is "Join." For, rather than representing a barrier, the Mediterranean "joins." It joins Middle East oil with western Europe. It joins Indian Ocean shipping with the Atlantic Ocean. It joins Soviet ice-free Black Sea ports with the Atlantic and Indian Ocean trade routes. It joins together the southern NATO partners. It joins some of the west's most important industrial nations with their markets and resources.<sup>1</sup>

And it joins the Middle East Arab nation together, the eastern and western Arab nation. It is considered a great lake in the heart of the ancient world, in this respect the Mediterranean "joins" Europe, Africa, and Asia, too. Lastly, the Mediterranean is called in Arabic the Middle White Sea (El Baher El Abyad El Moutawasyte).

The purpose of this paper is to present the strategic importance of the Mediterranean. Given that purpose, it would be appropriate to discuss the issue through these segments:

- o Historical review.
- o The strategic importance of the Mediterranean.
  - oo Geographically.
  - oo Politically.
  - oo Economically.
  - oo Militarily.
- o Peace and security in the Mediterranean.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Admiral Harry Train, "Maritime Strategy in the Mediterranean," in Adelphi Papers, No. 229, Prospect for Security in the Mediterranean, p. 49.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORICAL REVIEW

"The struggle over the strategic control of the Mediterranean is considered one of the most persistent and continuous struggles in the history of mankind."<sup>1</sup>

In ancient times, the Mediterranean witnessed the dominance of ancient Egyptians over its eastern parts, then the extension of the Phoenicians' dominance over its coasts, east and west, then the dominance of the Persians and the Greeks which were followed by the dominance of Romans over the Mediterranean Basin. The Islamic conquests followed, and from then until now the Mediterranean Basin has been divided into two distinct parts; the Arabs gave eastern and southern Mediterranean an Islamic impression, while its western part carried a Latin and Christian impression.

In the Middle Ages, the Crusades succeeded one another across the Mediterranean to the Holy Lands, and the Mediterranean Sea witnessed the emergence and dominance of Italian cities. Later in the western Mediterranean, the modern Christian Spanish Kingdom emerged and terminated Arab rule there. Following that, the Ottoman Turks emerged as an advanced maritime power in the 16th century.

From the 19th century to World War II, the competition, the struggle, and later the dominance over the Mediterranean was divided between the British and the French Empire, while the Italians were present in the central Mediterranean.

By the end of World War II and the emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union, as the two superpowers each tried to fill the gap that resulted from the weakness of Britain and France which earlier dominated the



region. Since then, the competition and struggle in the Mediterranean began between the two giants.

It is no wonder that the struggles of the Great Powers started at the center, the junction of the most important lines of maritime, land and air communication, and the junction of the most important petroleum pipelines from the Arab peninsula and the states of the Arab Gulf. These lines represent the basis and cornerstone of industrial progress in the advanced countries.

The countries of the Mediterranean Basin were affected by the struggle of the superpowers in this vital area, politically, economically, and militarily. Many of the region's countries have internal differences, political struggles, border problems or economical problems.

The superpowers had also thought to exploit the local struggles for the sake of spreading their influence or restoring their areas of influence and to increase their influence by controlling the potentialities of these countries. This was done according to their world strategy that included this area as one of the world's vital areas.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Egyptian Military Research Authority, Egypt and the Middle East, Part 1, p. 170.

## CHAPTER III

### THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

The strategic importance of the Mediterranean emerges from several aspects, which include:

- o The geographic importance.
- o The political importance.
- o The economic importance.
- o The military importance.

#### THE GEOGRAPHIC IMPORTANCE<sup>1</sup>

The Mediterranean is an internal sea which connects the Atlantic Ocean with the Indian Ocean through the Suez Canal and the Red Sea. The Black Sea is considered as an extension to the Mediterranean and is connected to it by the Straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. The Mediterranean extends from the east to the west for a distance of 3,860 kilometers between Latakia and Gibraltar. The widest distance between its northern and southern coasts is nearly 1,800 kilometers. Owing to its large width, the dominance over it is no longer held by the most powerful fleets only; for dominance also meant air and subsurface superiority. To dominate the Mediterranean, it is necessary to dominate its coasts and islands; a fact that underlines the importance for outside powers to obtain Mediterranean naval bases and facilities.

Geographically the Mediterranean is divided into two large basins: the eastern basin and the western basin. A maritime strait, whose width is nearly 80 miles, separates the two basins between Sicily and the Cap Bon. Through this strait, trade flows from the west to eastern Mediterranean countries. The eastern Mediterranean countries also depend on this strait to reach the

Atlantic Ocean. Therefore, Malta, Sicily and Tunisia have strategic importance since the air and maritime bases in these areas can monitor the ships that pass through this strait. Blocking the strait would bring maritime travel to a standstill.

The most important Islands in the Mediterranean are Cyprus, Crete and the Dodecanese islands and Corfu, all located in the eastern basin; Sicily and Malta in the middle, and Corsica and Sardinia in the west.

There are three main entrances to the Mediterranean, along with two secondary passage ways. Of strategic importance are Gibraltar in the west, with a width of 8.5 miles; the Turkish straits (Bosphorus and Dardanelles) in the east, and the Suez Canal. In addition to the main passageways in the Mediterranean are the Etranto Strait leading to the Adriatic Sea and Yugoslavia and thousands of islands spreading in the Aegean Sea north of Crete and controlling the passageway connecting the Mediterranean and the straits of Bosphorus. From ancient times, man has struggled to control these vital maritime waterways.

This geographic analysis shows that the Mediterranean's geographic features give it a strategic importance that has led to continuous struggles aiming to control it throughout history.

#### THE POLITICAL IMPORTANCE

The Mediterranean region comprises 17 countries which are different in their interests, policies, and phases of economic development. Some of these countries follow a policy committed to one of the superpowers, others follow independent policies. Some need economical and military aid, but wish to maintain and continue an independent policy. Meanwhile, the super powers try

to gain predominance in these countries or at least prevent them from following the other superpower.

A critical center of the world policy at the present time is probably the Mediterranean region in general and the southern and eastern Mediterranean coasts in particular.

Although the situation in eastern Europe is still not clear, we can consider that Europe is still divided into countries committed to one or the other of the superpowers. Most countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean are still uncommitted to either power. This shows that there was a tacit agreement between the two giants to respect each other's influence in Europe in favor of detente. Meanwhile, the two giants compete for influence over the countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean. The superpower competition is also limited by the necessity to avoid the risk of nuclear warfare.

The southern and eastern coasts of the Mediterranean have witnessed colonialism in all kinds and forms. Political segmentation was imposed on this coast in order to form small states and entities. The United States and the Soviet Union seem to have agreed to work to prevent the emergence of a regional great power that would unite the region in one political union unless they are certain that such a union would not pose any threat to their interests.

From the Soviet Union's point of view, if a large Arab state emerged and adopted a strategy hostile to the Soviets and in support of the United States, it would complete the circle that surrounds the Soviet Union. It would cut off Soviet access to Africa, and it would make Soviet presence in the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean almost impossible.

From the American point of view, if such a large Arab state adopted a strategy hostile to the United States and favorable to the Soviet Union, it would threaten the southern wing of NATO and break the security belt that extends around the Soviet Union.

In any case, it is noticeable that Israel's importance is given precedence, since Israel's existence provides an insurance against the danger of a unified Arab state aligned to the other block.

A number of conflicts are generally concentrated on this region. What makes such conflicts acute is the fact that this area is a center of interest and activity of the superpowers and shows the characteristics of instability. The major regional conflicts today include:

- o The Arab-Israeli struggle.
- o The Turkish-Greek struggle in Cyprus.
- o The national war in Lebanon.
- o The Morocco-Algerian-Mauritanian struggle.
- o Terrorism around the Mediterranean.

#### THE ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE

The countries on the northwestern coast of the Mediterranean--Italy, France, and Spain--are considered among the advanced industrialized nations. These states depend on petroleum as a source of energy in operating and developing their industrial institutions. Major industrial complexes for petrochemical distillation and processing petroleum derivatives have been established on the coasts of the northern Mediterranean countries. The Arab states bordering the southern Mediterranean have an abundance of raw materials and large amounts of nickel, petroleum, natural gas, tungsten and cobalt. Libya and Algeria provide a large portion of the European nations' needs of

petroleum and natural gas. This has made the western nations strive continuously to strengthen their economical relations with the Arab world to ensure the continuous flow of necessary energy.

The Mediterranean region is distinguished by the abundance of manpower, a fact that makes the region a large consuming market where the advanced industrial countries compete.

The eastern and southern countries of the Mediterranean depend on agriculture and have an abundance of agricultural lands and water sources. This provides the opportunity to use modern technology, a fact that suggests the possibility of increasing food products to satisfy the need of western European countries.

The Mediterranean Sea is a major avenue for commercial navigational movement. The number of commercial ships or fishing boats that cross its waters amount to about three thousand ships carrying one million tons of cargo per day.<sup>2</sup>

The Suez Canal plays a major role in the European economy since 40 percent of the petroleum needs of western Europe pass through it.<sup>3</sup> Annually, over 21,000 vessels transit the Suez Canal.<sup>4</sup> If we learn that, the world had lost \$16 billion as a result of closing the canal during the period 1967-1975, we should realize the major strategical importance which the Suez Canal represents to the economy of western countries.<sup>5</sup>

By controlling the Mediterranean through military alliance, military bases and deploying the United States Sixth Fleet there, the United States can protect the flow of petroleum. This goal became important after the 1967 closing of the Suez Canal and the 1973 oil embargo disrupted vital petroleum deliveries to Europe and the United States.

The Soviet Union regards the Mediterranean as economically important because of the following:

- o The Soviet Union could affect the petroleum interests of the west by controlling the Mediterranean. This could deprive the west of access to the large petroleum reserves in Algeria and Libya. This could also pave the way to control the reserves with a view to providing energy supplies to the Soviet economy in the future.
- o The Mediterranean is a lucrative market for Soviet products and could consequently deprive the west of these consumer markets.
- o The Mediterranean is a neighboring area to the Soviet Union, has a common border with it, and is the shortest way by sea from Soviet ports in the Black Sea to the Indian Ocean.

#### THE MILITARY IMPORTANCE

In importance, the military aspects of the Mediterranean surpass the economic and political aspects.

The Mediterranean Basin has had a major military importance, which was demonstrated during World Wars I and II. It was a decisive turning point in the courses of these wars.

Since that importance is considered the most vital importance of the Mediterranean either in peace or wartime, it is appropriate to discuss it in three segments as follows:

- o The military characteristics.
- o The importance from the west's point of view and its activities in it.
- o The importance from the point of view of the Soviet Union and its activities.

The military characteristics are summarized as follows:

- o Its long coasts and numerous bays and gulfs as well as the nature of its shores provide supply stations and hiding places for ships.

- o There are a large number of islands with ports, like Cyprus, Malta, Crete and others.

- o The Mediterranean is a series of basins and littorals connected by strategic choke points and dominated by strategic geographic features such as Gibraltar, Sicily, Malta, Cap Bon, Crete and the Suez Canal.

- o The depth of its water and the nature of its bottom relief allows submarines the best employment. This has played and is still playing an important and vital role in the military relations between the countries whose interests are associated with the Mediterranean.

- o The abundance of the administrative and logistic facilities in the Mediterranean countries makes it easy to maintain fighting forces there.

- o Concerning land operations around the Mediterranean, the sea has a significant importance in global war. It joins more than strategic theatres. From the Soviet's viewpoint "the Mediterranean falls within the southwestern TVD--theater of military action--which includes Turkey, the Suez Canal, North Africa and probably as far south as the Sahara."<sup>6</sup> The sea provides a strategic link between the southwestern TVD and western TVD, with its axis to Greece and Italy. From the American's viewpoint, the sea joins the United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) and the United States European Command (USEUCOM).

- o Air superiority is a critical imperative for securing and supporting maritime operation and sea or airlift. The sea provides a great possibility



to achieve such air superiority, due to the availability of its islands, its relatively narrow width and shore-based air bases as well.

#### THE MILITARY IMPORTANCE FROM THE WEST'S POINT OF VIEW

Western peacetime aims in the Mediterranean are to deter war, to preserve the integrity of the southern flank of NATO, to preserve the territorial integrity of NATO and friendly countries, to prevent the coercion of western powers and to minimize Soviet military power and influence.

These peacetime aims become wartime aims and objectives in the event that deterrence fails and the threshold of war is crossed. In such an event the obvious wartime aims become those of preserving the Mediterranean as a secure line of communication for the West and denying it to the Soviets.

The Mediterranean is considered as a bridge between the southern NATO's nations and NATO's geographically separated southern flank nations, Turkey and Greece.

An American control over the Mediterranean accomplishes the following:

- o Maintains maritime control in an area of vital interests.
- o Supports NATO as well as reinforces its capability. For this reason the United States has deployed the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean to protect and support its allies.
- o Aids the most vulnerable allies. This goal was demonstrated by stationing the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean in 1948 to counterbalance the Soviet pressures on Turkey and Greece after World War II.
- o Protects and ensures Israel's security.
- o Besieges and surrounds the Soviet Union. Because of the gains obtained by the Soviet in some of the Arab countries bordering the

Mediterranean--like Libya, Algeria and Syria--the United States aims at preventing the Soviets from establishing military bases and continuing to obtain facilities. This is done with a view to undermining the Soviet influence in the Arab region. This strategy is prompted by the fact that the prevalent situations in the Arab states are directly linked with the security and safety of western Europe.

Because of the Mediterranean's military importance, the essential elements of western wartime strategy are those of employing available force to capitalize on the West's geographic advantages and to exploit Soviet geographic weakness. This is done through choke point campaigns, securing any Mediterranean basins which are contested, destroying the Soviet submarine threat and sustaining the land war with reinforcement and resupply from the sea, with sea-based tactical air and with amphibious support of the land war.

#### THE MILITARY IMPORTANCE FROM THE SOVIET POINT OF VIEW

The Soviet Union considers the Mediterranean area as vitally important to its national security for the following reasons:

- o The Mediterranean is the antechamber to the Black Sea, which provided access to Russia and outflanks the defensive glacis to the west, it also bypasses the defense of distance, and it turns the large river barriers into highways leading to the Soviet interior.<sup>7</sup>

It gives the west access, either directly or once removed, to potentially rebellious satellites and dissident populations in the Soviet Union.

- o The Mediterranean provides access to the Black Sea, but the introduction of long-range, sea-based nuclear strike systems means that the Mediterranean is now more than an antechamber.

- o If it controlled the Mediterranean, the Soviet Union could outflank NATO's southern wing and support the Communist parties in the European countries bordering the sea.

- o If it had a strong presence in the Mediterranean, the Soviet Union could ensure the neutralization of western Europe in case of armed conflict on its eastern borders with China.

#### THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

Given the previous description of the geographic, political, military and economic importance of the Mediterranean, it is clear that the strategic importance of the Mediterranean is as follows:

- o It is the most important waterway that links west to east and north to south.

- o It is the shortest waterway to transport raw materials, especially petroleum, between the producing countries and industrialized countries.

- o It is the only waterway for the Black Sea countries, especially the Soviet Union, to gain access to warm waters.

- o It is possible to control the Middle East through it.

Strategic defense considerations for the Mediterranean also include the following:

- o The importance of the Mediterranean is generally prominent in controlling navigation. This was demonstrated during World War II when the Germans, by dominating Sicily, Sardinia and Crete, managed to control the Mediterranean. The sea was thereby closed for navigation, thus obliging the allies to transit their ships via the Cape of Good Hope.

If well defended, the Mediterranean islands may become invincible fortresses. The best example for this is Malta which, by its tenacity during

World War II against the German attacks, managed to save the British 8th Army which was fighting in the Egyptian desert.

The Mediterranean's international entrances to and from Europe, Asia, Africa, the Black Sea and the Adriatic Sea are extremely important. The control of such entries leads consequently to controlling world navigation directed from and to these areas.

The Sicily Strait divides the Mediterranean into two basins, eastern and western. Controlling this strait, which does not exceed 80 miles in width, results in controlling the flow of East-West trade. Besides, the air and naval forces, including the submarines supported on this strait, can detect, monitor and pursue convoys during passing through this strait. They can also disrupt the navigational movement in it.

Malta is important from the military point of view as a springboard to Egypt and the north African coast. This fact was revealed since Napoleon carried out his campaign on Egypt in 1798 and used Malta as a base to attack Egypt. Later, Britain used it as an intermediate base between Gibraltar and Egypt. Today, modern air and sea transport reduces Malta's importance but does not eliminate it.

Cyprus is militarily important as a springboard to the Arab countries east of the Mediterranean.

Owing to the nature of the Mediterranean, tracking and monitoring submarines there has become almost impossible. Therefore the presence of superpowers' submarines constitute a threat to navigation as well as military and trade convoys.

The position of Arab states bordering western Mediterranean (Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco) qualifies them to be of influence in controlling navigation in western Mediterranean.

Turkey is considered as a strategic pivotal axis because its geographic position serves in controlling the exit of the Black Sea.

"The study of political, economical and military situations in the Mediterranean suggests that the spark of future war could be kindled in that area owing to the possibilities of major power struggle to control its waters and dominate its shores,"<sup>8</sup> as well as the numerous local conflicts and internal unrest in some of the Mediterranean countries.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Egyptian Military Research Authority, Egypt and the Middle East, Part 1, p. 171.
2. Ibid., p. 179.
3. Ibid.
4. General Norman Schwarzkopf, "Witness Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee," February 8, 1990, p. 10.
5. Egyptian Military Research Authority, p. 179.
6. Michael McGwire, "Soviet Strategic Aims and Capabilities in the Mediterranean, Part I", in Adelphi Papers, No. 229, Prospects for Security in the Mediterranean, Part I, pp. 18-19.
7. Ibid., p. 14.
8. Egyptian Military Research Authority, p. 184.

CHAPTER IV  
PEACE AND SECURITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Promoting peace and security in the Mediterranean region is one of the main issues and concerns of all countries of this part of the world. Certainly, the issue is not only extremely important but it is also extremely complex, based upon its different interrelated problems and the diversity of the countries concerned.

The purpose of this chapter is to present the principal attempts to set up cooperation and achieve peace in this area of extreme strategic importance.

At first glance, there are some very important observations:

- o At the present, there are significant modifications and changes occurring in the international arena that surely will influence future developments in the area.
- o The question of security is not limited only to one part of the region. It ought to be viewed through three distinct dimensions, the first concerns the national security of each individual country. The second is the regional security of separate entities. Lastly, since World War II, the international dimension has imposed itself through the presence and influence of the superpowers.
- o The Mediterranean region is one of the most unstable areas in the world.

Since the end of World War II, one-third of the internal and international conflicts had happened in the Mediterranean area. The period 1973-1975 is considered the peak point with the Arab-Israeli War 1973, the Cyprus Crisis, Civil War in Lebanon and many other conflicts and sources of instability.<sup>1</sup>

- o The area has witnessed lately the emergence of new sources of instability, such as terrorism, religious fundamentalism, the tension

between the United States and Libya concerning the Sidra Gulf, and the escalation of the Libyan terrorist threat. It is clear that this tension is a result of the increasing Soviet influence. Beside the above sources of instability, there is the Palestinian question which is considered the main source of crises and tensions, not only in the area, but also internationally.

Unless there are significant international efforts to solve these pressing problems, in the near future they will become continually worse.

From the above observations, it is appropriate that we must begin with the meaning of "peace and security" in this region in order to understand the degree to which the current situation approaches the definition of "peace and security."

Generally speaking, "peace and security" in this case means all elements in the area working to establish cooperative relationships and overcome instability. These efforts should take into account the current international situation. From this vision it could be concluded:

- o Peace and security is a relative concept. It is impossible that all sources of instability will be eliminated quickly. However, the aim is to contain and to absorb them through a wide cooperative framework and to reduce their harmful impact. This would pave the way for the ultimate long-range goal of eliminating them altogether.

- o Achieving peace and security requires a mutual dynamic interaction between the region and the international framework. It is impossible to achieve peace and security without the effective cooperation of the superpowers.

Having explained the vision about the peace and security, it is necessary to point out the main characteristics of the current situation in the region:

- o More than one single power controls the Mediterranean, and these powers do not belong to the region.

- o The Mediterranean basin is not a homogeneous region, since the sea connects highly industrialized countries in the north with developing countries in the south.

- o The riparian countries of the Mediterranean can be grouped according to their geographical location: European countries, North African countries, and Middle Eastern countries on the southern and eastern coast. The European countries are linked by different ties which originate from historic, cultural, political and economic factors. Their political regimes vary from parliamentarian to presidential republics to constitutional monarchies. All these countries are capitalist except Albania and Yugoslavia. While even among the capitalist countries there are some political problems and tensions (Turkey and Greece), in general terms these countries present a "heterogeneous picture. Not only are there large differences in the size of population, in the level of health and in the states of economic developments, but also in the perception of national security."<sup>2</sup>

On the southern and eastern coasts the picture is more complicated due to demographic differences. While some nations with significant economic resources have very limited population, others have high and increasing population diversity, but limited resources. In addition, there are social and cultural differences and political and ideological contradictions.

In this area religion is an important element of differences. There are three monotheistic faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). Religion has been a major supporting factor for the various current political struggles.



Some religious fundamentalist movements have used religion as an instrument to influence the population and to achieve political-economic objectives. As the situation has developed "the willingness of outside nations to support various religious groups in their struggle against each other has from time to time led to large scale confrontation."<sup>3</sup> The picture of religious struggle becomes worse when it is realized that different factions from the same religion also struggle against each other to achieve political goals.

o There are some crises which make it difficult to achieve peace in the near future, such as: the Western Sahara, the Lebanon crisis, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. These crises have led to instability, a problem which is not only limited to the states themselves, but has been extended outside the region.

An example of the outside interference is the French position concerning the Sahara Conflict. Because France backed Morocco's view, French-Algerian relations became threatened. Another example is the attitude of the superpowers concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict affects many other different countries in the region. In short, the current situation has implications which go far beyond the borders of the region, threatening world peace and security.

o The Arab-Israeli conflict is the main source of instability in the region. It is considered as a "spark" for most of the crises in the Middle East which threaten the international stability.

For more than two generations now, the question of Palestine has been crying for a just and lasting settlement. Failure to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict has increased tension not only between the Arab states and Israel, but also among the Arab states themselves and has provided a major impetus for extremist politics.<sup>4</sup>

The Arab-Israel conflict has led to other unstable phenomena such as

- o The Armament race.
- o Religious fundamentalism (Moslem-Jewish).
- o Terrorism.
- o Escalating polarization between the superpowers.
- o Escalating Israeli retaliation either inside or outside the occupied territory.
- o The uprising (the Intifada).
- o Rise of social and economic problems.

In addition, "the long-standing Arab-Israeli dispute exerts a dominant influence in U.S. relations with states in the region."<sup>5</sup> In summary, "the Mediterranean area is after all, the only area in the world where western democracies, Communist regimes, nonaligned states, rich oil producers and poor developing countries live side by side."<sup>6</sup>

From the above overview, it is clear that the status quo is a group of conflicts, contradictions, and crises which interact in the absence of common regional will to produce an explosive situation.

Among all these pessimistic circumstances there is an optimistic hope to overcome these hardships. It is appropriate to point out the efforts to achieve a degree of cooperation among some or all the countries in the region as an attempt to achieve stable and secure states.

First, the French-North Africa cooperation.

- o After the Arab Maghreb countries achieved their independence, France tried to preserve good relations with them to maintain its influence.

The French approach relies on the economic integration and cultural heritage.

Second, the Arab-European dialogue.

o This dialogue was begun in the aftermath of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. The dialogue relies on the historic-geographic facts, and it could achieve economic benefits to Europe and political benefits to the Arabs. Until now, the results are still less than both sides hope. Generally speaking, such dialogue might be considered as a nucleus to establish a cooperative and stable state in the whole region through mutual understanding.

It is necessary that the Arab nations should overcome their internal conflicts and adopt a unity of goals and efforts. They should absorb their intra-Arab differences and strive to initiate an effective and fruitful dialogue with the northern coast countries. The European countries, in turn, should demonstrate their understanding toward the Arabs and participate effectively in solving the current problems; particularly the debt problems.

Third, the nonaligned nations' effort.

o Establishing a "peaceful area" is one of the main ideas called for by the nonaligned nations in the region. To this end, they expended great effort in the European Security and Cooperation Conference in Helsinki in 1975 and the Nonaligned Nations Summit held in 1984, which Libya attended for the first time. The issue had been raised since 1973 in previous conferences. Their effort called for establishing peace and reducing outside interference. Moreover, they called for establishing "Mediterranean political club" to supervise the development of the common issues and calling on the superpowers to promote the peace in the region. As a matter of fact, despite these efforts, there is no tangible success, but it is a step on the way.

Fourth, the Soviet proposal.

o In March 1986, in the aftermath of the Gulf of Sidra crisis, General Secretary Gorbachev announced a proposal which called for a conference for security and peace in the region. The conference would include the

superpowers and the countries of the region as well. He called for a negotiation between the superpowers for simultaneously withdrawing the Soviet and American fleets from the Mediterranean.

Future trends.

- o No region remains static; this is the historical experience. Over time, issues will change.

- o The move into the decade of 1990s has been a revolutionary change in the world order. This change has included the lessening of tension between the United States and the Soviet Union, the dramatic change in the political structure of eastern Europe, the normalization of the relation between Egypt in one hand, and Libya and Syria in the other hand, the emergence of the Arab Maghreb Union, the Arab Cooperation Council, and the upcoming European unification in 1992. Similar such revolutionary events are possible in the future of the Mediterranean that could change the ancient sea to a "peaceful lake."

- o In this regard, it is appropriate to refer to the last superpowers' summit, which had been held on the waters of the Mediterranean. This conference could be considered as a symbol for such peaceful changes.

Having highlighted the historical background, the strategic importance, the attempts to achieve peace and security, and the future hope in the Mediterranean, there are still some questions that have to be answered:

- o In 1902 Admiral Mahan had prophesied that the Mediterranean would either come under the control of one dominating power or be a theater for continuous struggle.<sup>7</sup> Now, is this prophecy still valid? Is the one dominating power the only model for imposing stability in the region?

- o Shall the region enjoy peace and stability in the case of withdrawing the superpowers' fleets?

- o Do the regional countries have enough awareness to establish such a comprehensive peace? Do they have the capability and the will to face the challenges?

The answers for such questions are affected by several facts and factors, the most important of which are:

- o Due to the vital importance of the region, it makes the area a center of attraction for the foreign powers.

- o The nature of strategic balance in the international affairs makes it impossible that one superpower would eliminate the other or even abandon its influence and presence to the other.

- o There is no so-called "pilot-state" which could control all events in the region, and there is an absence of enough awareness from the regional countries to deal with their problems in a constructive and cooperative way without outside interference.

Having discussed these factors, and aware of the history of change, from optimistic viewpoint, it could be said that achieving such peace and security is not impossible. It might be difficult, it might be prolonged, but it is possible if the effort would be concentrated in three integrated levels:

- o The international level--superpowers should manifest a real will to help to solve the local conflicts, or at least to avoid confrontation as happened in the 1973 crisis. They should appreciate the regional wish to establish a "peaceful sea" and enjoy tranquility.

- o The national level--each country should consider the organic relation which connects each country with the area. The regional countries should demonstrate mutual understanding and appreciation for each nation's national security on one hand, and the overall security of the region on the other hand.

o The regional level--It is urgent to develop and promote an economic system which could help the developing countries to overcome their economic problems. This cooperation would reduce to great degree the probability of internal instability. Economic cooperation is considered one of the most significant approaches to promote peace and security. It paves the way for other dynamics to absorb and contain problems and to reach peace as an ultimate goal.

At the end of the 20th century, we might ask, is it possible for the countries of the region to achieve peace and security? Or should they wait for "the historical power" to impose peace itself?

#### ENDNOTES

1. Dr. Aymad Awad, "Peace and Security in the Mediterranean," in Al-Siyassa al-Dawlya, p. 203.

2. Rainer W. Rupp, Burden Sharing and the Southern Region of the Alliance, p. 27.

3. W. B. Fisher, ed. The Middle East and North Africa, p. 11.

4. King Hussein II, "Strategic Appraisal of the Middle East," Chapter 19, The Arab World--Prospects for Stability, Air War College, p. 12.

5. General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, "Witness Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee," February 8, 1990, p. 35.

6. John Chipman, NATO's Southern Allies: Internal and External Challenge, p. 3.

7. Awad, p. 208.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

The previous chapters have shown the strategic importance of the Mediterranean, analyzed the current situation, and examined the possibility of achieving peace and security in this region of extreme strategic importance.

The study began with presenting a historical review which revealed the following:

- o The struggle over the strategic control of that sea began in ancient times by the dominance of ancient Egyptian and then by various other powers through the Middle Ages and the modern time. Currently the superpowers share dominance and the struggle in that sea and region.

Then, the study analyzed several aspects, which together shaped the strategic importance of the Mediterranean. These aspects are as follows:

- o The geographic importance: The sea connects the Atlantic Ocean with each of the Indian Ocean, the Adriatic and the Black Sea. It joins Europe, Africa and Asia, it contains several important islands and several shock points which control the navigations. All these features give the sea a strategic importance that led to continuous struggle in order to control it.

- o The political importance: The region comprises 17 countries with different interests, regimes and policies. Some of them follow a policy committed to one of the superpowers and others follow independent policies. These features led to a competition between the superpowers to gain predominance in the region.

- o The economic importance: The northwestern coast countries depend on petroleum and raw materials from the Arab states bordering the southern coast. The region is a large consuming market and the sea is a major avenue for commercial navigational movement. These features make the western block

strive to strengthen their economic relations with the Arab world and protect the flow of petroleum through the military presence and their political and economical influence. The Soviet Union regards that region as economically important since the Soviets could affect the interests of the west, and the sea is the shortest waterway from the Soviet ports in the Black Sea.

o The military importance: The sea is a series of basins and littorals connected by strategic choke points. Its long coasts, numerous bays and gulfs, islands, the depth of its waters, and the presence of logistic facilities give the sea a significant military importance. From the western viewpoint, the sea is considered as bridge between NATO's southern nations and southern flank nations; moreover, it joins the U.S. Central Command and the U.S. European Command. From the Soviet viewpoint, the sea is vitally important to its national security, since it is the antechamber to the Black Sea. Moreover, it provides a strategic link between the southwestern TVD and western TVD.

The study of political, economical and military situation in the region suggests that the spark of future war could be kindled in that area.

The study has examined the current state of peace and security in that region. It has shown the most importance aspects concerning the stability in the region. They are:

o The current modification in the international arena will influence future developments in the region.

o The question of security is not limited to the region's countries, but it concerns the superpowers as well.

o There are several sources of instability, which severely affect the peace and security, not only in the area, but also internationally. The most



dangerous of them is the Palestinian question. It is considered as a "spark" for most of the crises in the Middle East.

The study has assumed that "peace and security" means: "all elements in the area working to establish cooperative relationships and overcome instability." This assumption leads to some deductions:

- o It is impossible for all sources of instability to be eliminated; however the aim is to contain them.

- o Awareness and will from all countries in the region are important to achieve such stability.

- o Effective cooperation from the superpower is vital to stability.

The study has pointed out the efforts and attempts conducted to achieve a stable and secure state, they are:

- o The French-North Africa cooperation.
- o The Arab-European dialogue.
- o The Nonaligned nations' efforts.
- o The Soviet proposal.

CHAPTER VI  
RECOMMENDATIONS

It is my view that achieving peace and security in the region is vitally important, not only for the region's countries, but also for the world order. I believe strongly that achieving such stable states requires intensive, long-standing efforts. These efforts should be directed as follows:

- o The lessening of tension between the superpowers should be expanded to include the Mediterranean.
- o The superpowers should demonstrate better understanding to the hope of region's countries and their interests. The superpowers should enable them to solve their internal problems.
- o The regional countries should have enough awareness, mutual understanding and will to achieve each nation's security and the overall security of the region.
- o Developing and promoting an economic system on mutual cooperation base is urgent as a prelude to achieving a comprehensive peace.
- o Mutual dynamic interaction between the region and the international framework is substantial.

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